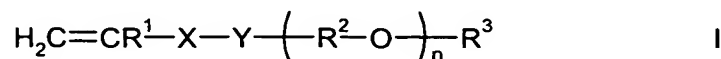


We claim:

1. A copolymer which comprises, in copolymerized form,

- 5 (A) 60 to 99% by weight of at least one monoethylenically unsaturated poly-alkylene oxide monomer of the formula I



10 in which the variables have the following meanings:

X is -CH₂- or -CO-, if Y is -O-;
is -CO-, if Y is -NH-;

Y is -O- or -NH-;

15 R¹ is hydrogen or methyl;

R² are identical or different C₂-C₆-alkylene radicals, which may be arranged blockwise or randomly;

R³ is hydrogen or C₁-C₄-alkyl;

n is an integer from 3 to 50,

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(B) 1 to 40% by weight of at least one quaternized nitrogen-containing monoethylenically unsaturated monomer,

(C) 0 to 39% by weight of anionic monoethylenically unsaturated monomers
25 and

(D) 0 to 30% by weight of other nonionic monoethylenically unsaturated monomers

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and has an average molecular weight M_w of from 2000 to 100 000.

2. The copolymer according to claim 1, which comprises, in copolymerized form, as monomer (A), at least one monomer of the formula I in which the variables have the following meanings:

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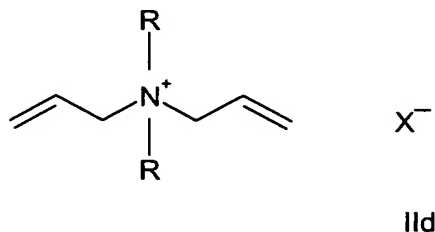
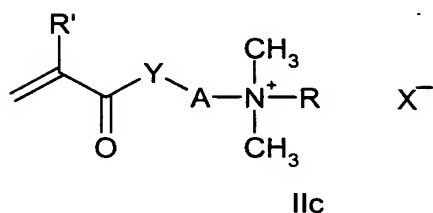
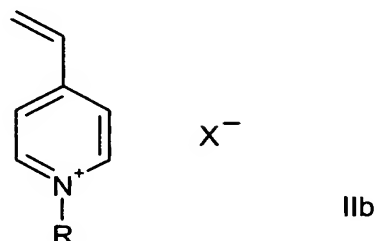
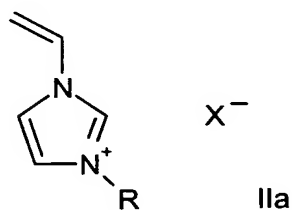
X is -CO- or -CH₂-;

Y is -O-;

- R^1 is hydrogen or methyl;
 R^2 is ethylene, propylene or mixtures thereof;
 R^3 is methyl;
 n is an integer from 5 to 30.

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3. The copolymer according to claim 1 or 2, which comprises, in copolymerized form, as monomer (B), at least one of the monomers of the formula IIa to IIc



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in which the variables have the following meanings:

- R is C_1 - C_4 -alkyl or benzyl;
 R' is hydrogen or methyl;
 Y is -O- or -NH-;
 A is C_1 - C_6 -alkylene;
 X^- is halide, C_1 - C_4 -alkyl sulfate, C_1 - C_4 -alkylsulfonate and C_1 - C_4 -alkyl carbonate.

4. The copolymer according to claims 1 to 3, which comprises, in copolymerized form, 60 to 98% by weight of monomer (A), 1 to 39% by weight of monomer (B) and 1 to 39% by weight of monomer (C).
5. The copolymer according to claims 1 to 4, in which the weight ratio of (A) to (B) is $\geq 2:1$ and for the case where the copolymers comprise a monomer (C) in copolymerized form, the weight ratio of (A) to (C) is also $\geq 2:1$.

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6. The use of copolymers according to claims 1 to 5 as dispersants for clay minerals.